

## **Housing Committee**

Public Testimony of the CT Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

S.B. 4: *An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs*

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February 28, 2023

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced, marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leader in the development of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination and increase gender equity.

Through CWEALF's Legal Education Program, we provide information, education, referrals, and bilingual advocacy to the Connecticut community to ensure that all individuals in our state have access to legal justice. The majority of CWEALF's clients are low-income women with at least one dependent who earn incomes less than \$29,000 per year. CWEALF urges the committee to support S.B. 4: *An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs*, which will prohibit a landlord from increasing rent during the first year of a tenancy and during a public health emergency or by more than a certain calculated amount on an annual basis and will require a landlord to provide written notice to a tenant not less than ninety days prior to increasing the rent.

Connecticut renters saw average rent increases of 20% in the last two years, with some areas experiencing 30-40% increases. Current Connecticut law does not limit how much landlords can raise rent, even while renters cannot afford to pay more and wages are not keeping up with rising costs: 52% of renters in Connecticut are already cost-burdened and spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing. Skyrocketing rent drives homelessness, evictions and displacement. Research shows a \$100 increase in rent is associated with a 9% increase in homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

Research from CT Data Collaborative shows how decades of discriminatory housing policies and actions continue to directly harm Connecticut residents, especially women and communities of color. Eviction cases are disproportionately filed against female renters and even more disproportionately against Black and Hispanic/Latine women.<sup>2</sup> Renters who do not have lawyers are nearly twice as likely to have a removal order issued against them.

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<sup>1</sup> Ginny Monk, In CT, evictions are surging, and children of pay the price, Dec. 11, 2022, [bit.ly/3lJQxd0](https://bit.ly/3lJQxd0); US GAO, Homelessness: Better HUD Oversight of Data Collection Could Improve Estimates of Homeless Population" 2020, [bit.ly/3GgUJM5](https://bit.ly/3GgUJM5)

<sup>2</sup> CT Data Collaborative. Exposing Connecticut's Eviction Crisis. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d8b7b3eabff3c4f1954d802/t/62057272c4b6a807cdfcdabc/1644524147538/Evictions+One+Pager+Graphics+%281%29.pdf>

Senate Bill Number 4 mirrors similar policies in Oregon and California as well as over 200 municipalities across the country. Research shows that rent stabilization does not negatively impact housing development or quality, despite the claims from opposition who want to ensure that they can raise rents as much as possible.

Rent stabilization does not impact housing development or housing quality. Maintenance has always been an issue for renters long before this policy and will continue to be one that needs to be addressed with other complementary policies. We know having good cause and rent stabilization protections will mean families can ask for repairs with the safety and security of knowing their landlord can't displace them by increasing their rent or eviction.

Rent caps are a constitutional policy that provide predictable and reasonable rent increases and immediate relief for tenants from rising rent, especially as we create more affordable housing in our state. Renters deserve stability, including predictable rent payments and increases, which creates greater neighborhood stability and strengthens communities in the long term.

Connecticut should be a place where everyone has a dignified place to call home and the chance to put down roots in the community. While we support S.B. 4, we recommend the bill be amended to cover apartments that are in between tenants to prevent landlords from pushing out tenants to increase the rent. We also recommend language that expands good cause eviction protections to cover all tenants so they have greater stability in their homes. Connecticut families need more housing supply, and it takes hundreds of thousands of dollars and many years to plan for and construct. In the meantime, we need rent stabilization and good cause protections to keep people in our communities, so that they can access new housing when it's finally built.

All communities deserve the ability to advocate for their right to safe and habitable housing without fear of retaliation. CWEALF urges the Committee to pass this critical legislation this year.